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AUTHOR Hurrelmann, Klaus; And Others
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ABSTRACT

A study analyzed the school plans and status expectations of West German adolescents. The study was based on (1) an analysis of official statistical documents, (2) a standardized questionnaire survey of 1,717 adolescents aged 12-17 years, and (3) a longitudinal qualitative analysis of interviews carried out with 40 adolescents over a period of 8 years. The West German secondary school system differs from that of most other industrial nations through its high degree of formal segregation of the various school types with corresponding differences in curriculum tracks. The study tested the proposition that this formally stratified secondary school system generates a process of social selection and accompanying restrictions on subsequent career perspectives. In addition, the study tested the proposition that, in all school types, substantial uncertainty regarding status expectations is manifest among those students who are threatened by relegation due to poor scholastic performance. The study proved that this status uncertainty correlates with an above-average incidence of dissatisfaction and health complaints. In West Germany, the development of uncertainty with regard to the outcomes of education and the resulting pressure for more academic attainment coupled with the threat of downward social mobility is of historic importance. The psychosocial costs of this situation can be felt in all social classes: the lower social classes are threatened with unemployment, whereas the higher social classes are threatened with not being able to maintain their high social status. (KC)

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Klaus Hurrelmann, Uwe Engel, and Birgit Holler
Bielefeld Univ.

Adolescents' Status Expectations in a Formally Stratified System of Secondary Schools

In this paper we analyse the school plans and status expectations of West German adolescents. The West German secondary-school system differs from that of most other industrial nations through its high degree of formal segregation of the various school types with corresponding differences in curriculum tracks. We test the proposition that this formally stratified secondary school system generates a process of social selection and accompanying restrictions on subsequent career perspectives. In addition, we test the proposition that in all school types substantial uncertainty regarding status expectations is manifest among those students who are threatended by relegation due to poor scholastic performance. We prove that this status uncertainty correlates with an above-average incidence of dissatisfaction and health complaints.

The studies are based on a) an analysis of official statistical documents, b) a standardized questionnaire survey of 1717 adolescents aged 12-17 years, and c) a longitudinal qualitative analysis of interviews carried out with 40 adolescents over a period of 8 years.

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In Figure 1, we present a diagram of the structure of the West German School System. As can be seen, the system is characterized by a distinction between different types of secondary schools:

- Gymnasium (grammer school)
- Realschule (intermediate school)
- Hauptschule (vocational preparatory school)
- Gesamtschule (comprehensive school)

The grammar school consists of a nine-year program leading to the grammar school certificate required for university entrance (Abitur). It has traditionally been a selective institution that demands high educational standards. The intermediate school offers a six-year course of study and leads to an intermediate school certificate permitting entry into white-collar, business, or skilled trade occupations. The vocational preparatory school offers a five-to six-year course and leads to a basic leaving certificate which has traditionally been sufficient for an apprenticeship leading to all blue-collar occupations. This school offers the least career opportunities and applies no selection procedure for the admittance of students. The comprehensive school offers a six-to nine-year course of study and leads to all the certificates mentioned. This school has only been established recently and is only existing in some of the federal states of the FRG. As the diagram shows, the second level of secondary school (Secondary II) is characterized by the last three years of the Gymnasium, full-time vocational school, or part-time vocational school combined with an apprenticeship. Though the system is not completely fixed, the school type chosen in Secondary I largely determines further steps. Attendance at

the vocational preparatory school and the intermediate secondary school limits the range of options in the higher levels of the system (Max Planck Institute, 1983).

1. Theoretical propositions

In all industrial societies, adolescence is defined as a period in which decisions are made in important areas of life which affect the social and professional status of adulthood (Engel, 1987; Hurrelmann, 1987). This is especially true in the case of formal education. The position which an adolescent assumes within the educational system offers particular options to him/her in subsequent educational courses and future professional careers, and at the same time prevents him/her from pursuing other options. On the basis of numerous studies, we know that one of the most important determining factors in this respect is the social background of the adolescents (Hauser and Featherman, 1976; Persell, 1977, Temple and Polk, 1986; Williams, 1972). The material and other resources, environmental living conditions, as well as the socialization patterns and cultural lifestyles of the family play a decisive role in determining a) the success or failure of children in school, b) the ensuing choice of further educational courses or school types at the secondary level, and c) the organization of the entire school career and the attainment of leaving certificates (DiMaggio, 1982; Husen 1992).

However, apart from the conditions within the family, we

should not neglect the effects of institutional and structural conditions of the school on the individual`s course of study. The structure of the secondary-school system, with its historical roots, the internal structuring of educational tracks and ability groups, as well as the standards and rules related to entry requirements for the various educational levels are all important factors in determining educational careers (Alexander, Cook, and McGill, 1978; Boudon, 1974; Eder, 1981; Entwisle and Hayduk, 1981; Gamoran, 1986; Kamens, 1977; Mare, 1981). These institutional and structural conditions reflect the general opportunity structure existing in a society at any one time and with which the respective age cohorts are confronted. The relationship existing between the work force and the educational system determines both the educational and the occupational opportunity structure(Carnoy and Levin, 1985; Collins, 1979; Kerckhoff and Corwin, 1981; McPershon and Willms, 1986; Olneck, 1979; Meyer, 1983; Sorensen and Hallinan 1977; Weidman and Friedmann, 1984).

By using the structure of the West German secondary-school system as an example of a formally differentiated and rank-stratified system, we shall, in the following paragraphs, concentrate in particular on the aforementioned second complex of factors that determine the process of educational careers. The essential difference between this school system and others can be seen in the fact that allocation to a particular secondary-school career is selfevident and transparent (Baker, Esmer, Le_nhardt, and Meyer, 1985). West German students attend different school types in separate school buildings in different parts of the town, city, or area. Attendance at a

particular type of school implicates a distinct preoccupation with particular expectations regarding future status and plans.

As in other Western industrial nations, in the FRG a process of tightening of the labor market can be observed, paralleled by a process of educational upgrading. According to our estimation, this results in an increase in the importance of the students' choice of type of secondary school, while at the same time there is an increase in the pressure to succeed. We will approach the question of whether the increase in pressure to succeed and to fulfill the parents' expectations has an effect on the personal well-being and social behavior of the adolescents. We expect an increase in insecurity regarding status expectations in those pupils who, due to poor performance in school, are threatened by downward social mobility and as a consequence are unable to fulfill their parents' wishes and expectations in regard to their school career. Although a certain amount of status insecurity is a usual accompanyment of pupils in secondary schools - due to the transitory character of this phase of life -, we must nevertheless expect that a marked increase in status insecurity will lead to "psychosocial costs" that may be manifest in dissatisfaction or problem behavior (Hurrelmann, Engel, Holler, and Nordlohne, 1987).

Thus, we will be addressing the "side effects" of the educational expansion that has taken place within the confines of the formally stratified school system in West Germany. Our analyses could stimulate comparative research that would

include schools of varying degrees and with varying patterns and structures of stratification of courses of study at the secondary level. In sum, the central theoretical premises on which our analysis is based are as follows:

1st Premise

The Federal Republic of Germanys' differentiated and hierarchically structured school system, with its organizatorial separation of school types, demands an early decision by parents in respect to their children's scholastic and career plans. The allocation to a particular secondary school type is a decision embracing specific career perspectives, school certificate aspirations, and career-relevant future plans (status expectations). In addition, the allocation to a particular school type represents a formal social selection process according to social origins.

2nd Premise A relatively high insecurity of status expectations is probable in groups of pupils that a) are in danger of having to repeat a class or to transfer to a lower school type due to poor performance, or who have already experienced such a relegation, and b) due to the type of school and curriculum track chosen, are not able to attain a leaving certificate that would be compatible with their parents' wishes, plans or own educational level. In addition, we assume that a high insecurity of status expectations in the respective groups of students leads to psychosocial costs that are manifest in above-average incidence of dissatisfaction and health complaints.

2. Method and Sample

Our empirical investigation consists of three approaches:

1. An analysis of official statistical records.

2. A survey of 1.717 students aged 12 to 17, using a standardized questionnaire. The survey started in the fall of 1986 with the collection of data from seventh-grade and ninth-grade-pupils from all four school types of the first stage of secondary education in the federal state of North-Rhine-Westphalia. As the survey is a panel design, these two cohorts will we reinterviewed at one-year intervals until they complete secondary school. The sample includes three regions: an urban agglomaration area, a middle-sized urban area, and a rural a_rea. The schools and classes in the three regions under study were selected at random. A complex sampling procedure was chosen that provided a two-step probability sampling for each of the three regions. First the schools were selected and then the selection of classes within these schools was carried out. The questionnaires were distributed in the classrooms and took about 90 minutes to be filled out.

3. Longitudinal case studies of 40 students aged 14 at the first wave of three panels over a period of eight years. We conducted 20 interviews with students from vocational preparatory school and 20 interviews with students from grammar school. The inquiry consisted of slightly structured interviews each lasting about an hour. Our

analysis is based on the transcripts of all 120 interviews (40 interviews, 3 waves).

Results

3.1 Choice of School Type as a Commitment to Specific Status Expectations

Changes in educational aspirations

Within the last three decades, a shift in preferences for the various school types in the Federal Republic of Germany has taken place. The attractivity of the vocational preparatory school (Hauptschule) - the dominant school type during the 1950's - has continually decreased. In addition, since the mid-1970`s, integrated comprehensive schools (Gesamtschulen), usually in the form of "choice-oriented" schools, have been introduced. Table 1 shows the changes in percentage shares of the various school types within the last thirty years. (The schools of special education, "Sonderschulen", are basically oriented towards learn-def_icient, physically or mentally handicapped children.)

Table 1: Percentages of 7th grade students in West Germany according to school type and school year

School year	Vocational prep school	Intermed school	Grammar school	Compreh school	Special school	row total
1952/53	79	6	13	0	2	100
1962/63	68	13	16	0	3	100
1972/73	46	23	24	2	5	100
1982/83	38	27	27	5	4	100

(Hansen, Roesner, and Weissbach, 1986, p. 79)

Table 1 shows a consistent increase in the attendance figures of higher-grade schools. The number of 7th grade students attending intermediate and grammar schools has increased from a 19 % minority in 1952/53, to a 54 % majority in the 1980`s. Thus, a kind of "educational expansion" has taken place within the existing structures of the secondary school system. The attraction of the traditional intermediate school and the grammar school education has proved to be extremely strong. At the same time, the vocational preparatory school lost much of its appeal despite an educational policy which has sought to reform and upgrade it, for example, by offering courses in grade 9 and 10 that can provide formal access to the second level of the grammar school and the full-time vocational schools. Moreover, the attempts to develop equivalent alternatives to the traditional school types by establishing comprehensive schools have not been successful until now if we consider the relative low plercentage of students visiting this type of school.

Recent nation-wide survey studies show the importance that parents place upon their children being able to attend high-grade schools with good educational prospects. Table 2 shows the results of such surveys conducted in the Federal Republic of Germany.

Table 2: Parents responses to the question: "Which leaving certificate do you wish your child to attain?"

	Desired leaving certificate (in percentages)			
survey year	Voc prep school	Interm school	Grammar school	row total
1979	31	32	37	100
1980	17	38	45	100
1983	13	36	51	100
1985	11	35	54	100

(Rolff, Klemm, and Tillmann, 1986, p. 22)

Table 2 shows that only about one-tenth of the parents regard the basic leaving certificate of the vocational preparatory school as the qualification they would like their children to achieve - a qualification that, a generation ago, was the standard leaving certificate for more than three-quarters of the members of a school year (Bundesminister für Bildung und Wissenschaft, 1985, p. 62). The parents' wishes in regard to their children's education must be seen in light of the difficulties in the FRG employment situation that have led to an "inflation" of entry requirements. A high-grade leaving certificate has become a necessary but not sufficient prerequisite for entry into attractive fields of employment

(Hurrelmann, 1981, 1984 a). Those school leavers who "only" complete the vocational preparatory school and particulary those that leave this school without the basic school leaving certificate (- these "drop-outs" make up about 10 % of their respective age group -) face an extremely difficult situation in training and employment fields.

Statistical Data on the Selection Process

The selection process of the West German school system leads to a distribution of students in the various school types that is related to social origins. This unequal distribution reveals itself most clearly at three distinct points in the educational selection process: a) upon entering the secondary stage I educational courses (5th to 10th grade) which begin after the completion of primary school; b) upon entering the secondary stage II educational courses (11th to 13th grade); and c) upon entering university, after completion of the secondary stage II (13th grade).

In all three phases, working-class children are at a disadvantage, whereas middle- and upper-class children are overrepresented. In the FRG this process of social selection can be clearly observed due to the system of allocating pupils to distinct school types after completion of the 4th grade. The figures of the Federal Bureau of Statistics latest micro-census show the effects of this social selection at the 8th-grade level (table 3).

Table 3

Distribution of 13 to 14 year old West German students in the different types of school according to the occupation of the head of the family in 1979 (in percentages)

type of school	occupation of the head of the family					
	self-employed persons	civil servants	white-collar workers	blue-collar workers	un-employed persons	row total
vocational prep	39	21	26	63	60	46
intermediate	27	24	29	21	17	24
grammar	29	50	38	10	14	23
comprehensive	3	4	4	4	3	4
special	3	2	2	3	5	3
	100	100	100	100	100	100
column total	14	8	26	42	9	100

(Bundesminister für Bildung und Wissenschaft, 1981)

According to these data, 63 % of the 13 to 14 year old children from working-class families attended the vocational preparatory school in 1979. The corresponding figures for children of white collar workers' and civil servants' families are very low in comparison. For these children, the attendance at the grammar school is predominant, whereas working class children are extremely underrepresented here. In comprehensive schools, the inequality of opportunities between the social classes is clearly lower than in the formally segregated school system.

During the process of education, the proportion of middleclass children continually increases. This development is especially noticable at the entry stage to higher courses in grammar school. The proportion of workingclass children who advance to these courses is much smaller than the proportion of such children having originally entered grammar school at the secondary stage I. With the transition to universities and professional schools, the proportion of working-class students once again declines sharply. Apparently, the pupils of middle- and upper-class families are more successful in maintaining the standards previously achieved in the high-grade educational courses (Peisert, 1981). Consequently, the distribution of leaving certificates is strongly correlated with social class origins.

Effects of Educational Upgrading

As stated previously, the process of formal educational upgrading in West Germany increases the educational demands placed upon the pupils. The children of middle- and upper class families are forced to develop strategies to avoid downward social mobility and to enable them to enter careers that are consistent with their social status. Pupils of lower-class origins are forced to develop strategies that counteract the increasing competion and that assist in achieving the best possible starting point for the transition to the employment sector. For this reason, all social classes direct their efforts toward attaining the most highly

qualified leaving certificates. The efforts to optimize the chances of attaining the best possible starting position for entry into subsequent careers are an integral part of the behavioral strategy of all social classes (Hurrelmann, 1984 a).

As a result, the school is the place where competition between the social classes for the best starting positions in the employment sector is most prevalent. However, it is a competition that favors the middle- and upper-class pupils - these being better at creating and maintaining optimizing strategies as a result of being more able to adapt to the rules of interaction and communication within the school system. The middle-class families are therefore able to maintain their privileged position, not only by having more material resources ("financial capital"), but also increasingly through "cultural" investment, or "educational capital" (Bourdieu, 1984).

Statistical analyses for the FRG show the effects of this process clearly. Although the percentage of 16 to 18 year olds attending school has increased within the last three decades, the socioeconomic structure of school attendance has not changed. Educational expansion has not affected the basic structural inequality of the social classes. Those social classes that for generations had relied on economic mechanisms to maintain their status have, in the last 20 years, considerably increased their numbers in the educational institutions and have thereby maintained their status through cultural mechanisms. Although the working classes also show

more participation in educational processes, these families remain at the lower end of the social scale, whereas civil servants, self-employed persons, and persons in high-ranking occupations have maintained their positions by intensifying their efforts (Rolff, 1981, p. 64).

Educational aspirations according to school type attended

Our own survey study concentrates on the adolescents' educational aspirations and shows that these aspirations are extremely ambitious. Only 9 % of all 7-to 9th grade youths questioned were prepared to accept a vocational prep leaving school certificate as their aim, whereas 43 % intended achieving an intermediate-school leaving certificate, and 37 % aimed at attaining a grammar-school leaving certificate. The responses differ greatly according to type of school attended (Table 4).

Table 4: Adolescents' leaving-certificate ambitions according to type of school attended (in percentages)

School type attended	Desired certificate: voc prep certificate	intermed certificate	grammar certificate	un-decided	row total
Vocational prep	26	55	7	12	32
intermediate	0	68	19	13	28
comprehensive	8	45	38	10	9
grammar	0	9	83	8	32
column total	9	43	37	11	N= 1712

(significance 0.0; C = .60)

Table 4 shows a significant relationship between type of school attended and school leaving certificate ambitions. The high percentage of grammar-school students aiming to achieve a grammar-school leaving certificate is especially noticeable. The other types of leaving certificates are hardly mentioned, and the "undecided" quota is minimal. Here we clearly see, that, in the pupils' opinion, the grammar school is the school type that more or less automatically leads to attainment of university entrance requirements. We also find that intermediate-school pupils focus strongly on one particular leaving certificate, whereas the comprehensive-school pupils show high values in respect to intermediate and grammar-school leaving certificates - the latter being aimed at by 38 % of the pupils. The vocational-preparatory-school pupils are noticable for the fact that only one-quarter are prepared to accept the corresponding leaving certificate as their aim, and that the majority are oriented towards high-grade certificates that can only be achieved by taking additional courses.

These results confirm our premise, which stated that the choice of a particular school type represents a decision for definitive, specialized school and career prospects. These findings are also substantiated by studies showing that actual mobility between the school types is minimal. Once a student is allocated to one of the types of secondary school, he/she can be expected to remain there with 90 % probability. Changes that do occur are usually relegatory (9 %), whereas upgrading is extremely rare (1 %) (Hansen, Roesner, and Weissbach, 1986, p. 75).

3.2 The psychosocial costs of insecurity of status expectations

In section 1, our second theoretical premise expresses the assumptions that status insecurity is a potential source of weakened psychosocial well-being. To prove the empirical tenability of this assumption, some analyses have been carried out. First, "dissatisfaction with school performance" is taken as the dependent variable.

Dissatisfaction with school performances

Status insecurity may be experienced to the extent to which the school performances are felt as deviating from the social expectations of significant reference persons. We expect the parents to represent one of the most significant reference groups. If the adolescent perceives his/her own school

performances as being lower than expected by his parents, dissatisfaction may arise.

Furthermore, it is expected that the highly segregated school-system in the F.R.G. leads to corresponding pattern of social contacts and comparisons among the peers. Such segregated social circles would then strongly support within-group comparisons, particularly regarding achievement-related topics, and the tendency to form exclusive social frames of reference. As far as school performances are concerned, this frame of reference is expected to be given primarily by classroom-communities and friendship-circles. Therefore, within-group comparisons seem to be more likely to arise than social comparisons with peers attending different types of school. That the adolescents primarily make comparisons with peers attending their own school type, is assumed to be a typical consequence of the formally differentiated school structure in the F.R.G.

This segregation of comparative reference groups corresponds to the teachers' formal evaluation of scholastic performance. Identical assessment scales are used in all school types and do not distinguish between the differences in respective standards and prestige of these various school types. The pupils, therefore, are in most cases confronted only with performance standards within their respective school types, the differences in rank between school types only being manifest when the structure and quality of the various leaving certificates are compared (cf., for the USA, Epstein and Karweit, 1983).

In our questionaire, every student was asked to name his best friend (of the same sex). Then, some characteristics of this friend were recorded, among them being the type of school attented. One empirical finding is that it is very probable to name as best friend a person attending the same type of school, most of these friends were class-mates (about 79% , in voc.prep.school 58%) (Engel, 1987).

Dissatisfaction with school performances was measured on a seven-point-scale ranging from very satisfied to very dissatisfied. We got a frequency distribution showing no serious departure from normality. A dummy-regression-strategy seemed therefore the most appropriate strategy. Table 6 displays the estimates of effect yielded by the final dummy-regression-model. In previous stages of model testing, statistically negligible estimates of effect have been left out successively, resulting in the model displayed here.(This model corresponds to a loglinear model having - in a substantial sense - equivalent estimates of effect and reaching an acceptable Chi-square goodness-of-fit, namely p=.36. Thus, we preferred this model to an alternative model that only includes the main effects of the independent variables. For more details on the methodological procedure see Engel, 1986).

Table 6: Dissatisfaction with school performances, type of school attended, perceived parental expectations, and educational status of parents (unstandardized dummy regression coefficients; n=1706; variance explained: 30.6%)

Effect	Estimates of effect		
	b	b/s.e	(b/s.e; if main effects only)
Constant	2.29	38.6	(39.19)
Type of secondary school attended			
· grammar school	.18	2.50	(3.88)
· intermediate school	.16	2.44	(2.34)
· comprehensive school	.36	2.93	(1.66)
(as compared with vocational preparatory school)			
School performances			
· below (perceived) parental expectations	1.67	21.10	(26.37)
· parental expectations explicitly unknown	.89	14.36	(14.25)
(as compared with those having performances that meet the perceived parental expectations)			
High parental education (grammar school or more)	-.13	-2.09	(-2.04)
(as compared with those having low parental education)			
Interactions:			
· attending grammar school x school performances below parental expectations	.38	2.85	
· attending comprehensive school x parental expectations unknown	-.52	-2.74	
(as compared with the remaining configurations)			

The table shows the values of the unstandardized regression coefficients. These coefficients represent estimates of the expected difference, in terms of the unit of the dissatisfaction-scale, between the respective group to which the coefficient refers and the comparison group. In case of type of school attended, this comparison group is the lowest grade secondary school, i.e. the vocational preparatory school. In case of the parental-expectation-variable, the comparisons are made with regard to those that meet the perceived parental expectations. The regression coefficients may then be inserted into an equation to yield, for the various groups involved, estimated dissatisfaction-values.

As the results show, it becomes evident that the group attending the lowest grade school, i.e. the vocational school, are the least unsatisfied, or, stating this the other way round, are the most satisfied. For all other types, a somewhat higher dissatisfaction-value is to be expected (all expected differences are positive). In which case we have to expect the highest dissatisfaction depends on the model chosen. When using the model that also includes the statistical interactions, comprehensive school lies in front, when using the model that only provides estimates for the main effects, grammar school lies in front. This comparison, however, is somewhat misleading in that it disregards the positive statistical interaction effects between "attending grammar school" and "having school performances below parental expectations". According to this estimate, additional dissatisfaction is estimated for those grammar-school-pupils that perceive their school performances as laying below the

level expected by their parents. On the other hand, in case of comprehensive-school pupils, dissatisfaction due to school is lowered when the parental expectations regarding school performance are additionally indicated as being unknown.

Thus, when bringing parental expectations into the picture, the overall-effect of type of school and expectations comes to the result that grammar school lies in front. Probably, the demands of grammar-school-pupils are so high that these pupils are more inclined to be dissatisfied, and this despite the fact that their objective performance is high compared to other school types. It is precisely this kind of school effect on dissatisfaction that can be expected under the conditions of a highly stratified educational system supporting much social segregation and in-group-comparisons among the peers. It seems to be much more probable to assume that the evaluations of school performances are anchored in the social frame of reference as provided by the type of school visited than comparisons across different types of school (which would then likely to be based on objective achievement-level and related characteristics).

With respect to perceived parental expectations, the findings in table 6 show clearly that there exist two strong sources of dissatisfaction: first, perceiving school performances below parental expectations, and, second, explicitly unknown parental expectations. When comparing both subgroups with those believing that their performances meet the parental expectations, for both groups a higher value on the dissatisfaction scale is estimated, respectively. - Finally,

it can be seen that high parental education is coupled with a lowered dissatisfaction-value.

Additional analyses confirm these data and show that a high degree of feelings of dissatisfaction and a high degree of psychosomatic complaints can be expected among those pupils whose scholastic success is endangered. The decisive criterium is whether a pupil (a) is in danger of having to repeat one or more school years due to poor performance, and/or (b) has already repeated one or more school years due to poor performance, and/or (c) is about to be transferred to a lower-graded school or has already experienced such a transfer. If these conditions prevail, the pupils can expect a temporary or permanent relegation in their scholastic careers that can, in the long run, result in failure to achieve high-grade qualifications. They are, in other words, in risk to lose the scholastic status they occupy, and consequently show symptoms of stress.

Additionally, the scores for psychosomatic complaints are expecially high in those sub-groups of pupils that show school performances below parental expectation. For example, this is the case in those sub-groups not attending a school type leading to a grammar school leaving certificate (Abitur) and having at least one parent with such a qualification. Our analysis shows particularly high scores for psychosomatic complaints for those students who attend vocational preparatory school but in whose families one or both parents had gotten the grammar school certificate. It seems that when the student's scholastic record cannot be expected to lead to

a certificate equal in value to that of the parents, the resulting stress manifests itself in psychosomatic complaints. Our results also show that scores for psychosomatic complaints are above average in those sub-groups of grammar school students whose parents had not achieved the school leaving certificate associated with this type of school. Here, the potential for stress is probably due to the pressure of the parents' expectations regarding the pupils' future educational career and subsequent status aspirations (Hurrelmann, Engel, Holler, and Nordlohne, 1987). ("Psychosomatic complaints" was operational. through presentation of a general symptoms checklist.)

The Search for Status Security: Optimizing Strategies

In addition, the results of our longitudinal qualitative interviews support our findings (cf. Hurrelmann 1984 b, 1988). The distinct increase in educational opportunities within the course of a generation is not perceived as an advantage by the adolescents and young adults questioned. Instead, their attention is directed toward the problems of the labor market. The majority of those questioned perceive the situation as a combination of factors that have to be faced up to. They look for individual ways of responding to the actual situation. Strategies of action are related toward optimizing existing opportunities.

The prevailing pattern of subjective assimilation of these circumstances thus consists of an individual maximizing of available opportinities which secure a favorable starting position for the transition from school to employment. This strategy is a perspective of action which as a rule is indifferent to questions of educational content. The different types of school education are instrumentalized within this strategy: they become means to an end, which is, of acquiring a school-leaving certificate.

From our interviews, it further emerges that even among the high-ability student groups at the grammar school, the potential risks involved in the status transition from school to university or employment, and the uncertainty of not being able to maintain the social status of their parents have become central topics of discussion - although the possibility of actual employment as part of their own career plans is still distant. Our analysis indicates that these students, when compared with the others, express even more insecurity and anxiety in relation to their plans for the future. The reason for this probably is the high social status which they share with their families.

Thus, our interview analyses document the fact that the expectations regarding future plans become confused for all groups of students with high educational aspirations, and especially for

1. the group of students according to whose family tradition a qualified graduation is not usual, because the achievements produced by additional effort do not effect security of an improved status and
2. the group of students according to whose family tradition a qualified graduation is usual, because the former, self-evident expectation of finding a position in the occupational system adequate to their status cannot be attained for certain.

Consequently, in spite of increased efforts, there is no definite reward for such efforts. The increased competition makes graduation certificates more important but less valuable. A person with no quaifications loses further educational and social changes; the person with qualifications has no guarantee of being able to utilize such qualifications. The possible effect of this paradoxical situation is an increase in the feeling of social stress.

4. Discussion

Our empirical data show that in the formally stratified secondary school system of the FRG, the adolescents ' status expectations are predetermined and channeled according to the type of school attended. After completing primary school, the choice of school type presents the adolescents with a scholastic career and corresponding leaving certificate that are foreseeable, thus enabling him/her to anticipate those

aspects of the educational process that are relevant to their educational aspirations and future careers.

In recent years, however, insecurity in respect to status expectations has arisen as a result of the dramatic increase in the difficulties associated with the change-over from school to employment sector. Due to the continuing decline in the employment market, the school's system of pre-selection for various careers - which was familiar to the FRG's postwar generation - no longer functions. Nowadays, because the exchange value of a leaving certificate can no longer be properly assessed, adolescents in all school types feel that they have been denied the 'fruits' of their scholastic labors.

At the same time, concern about the threat of downward social mobility leads to more pressure on the part of the parents for increased scholastic efforts, attendance at high-level schools (with corresponding high-value curricula), and the attainment of high-quality school leaving certificates.

In the FRG, this dramatic new development is of historic importance. The resulting increase in educational aspirations and pressure to achieve is manifest in all social classes. The upward spiraling effect on leaving certificates makes it more difficult for the adolescent to live up the preconceived status expectations, and the shortage of positions in the employment sector leads to stiff competition in which the highly qualified assert themselves against those with lower qualifications. The psychosocial costs of this situation can be felt in all social classes: The lower social classes are

threatend with unemployment, whereas the higher social classes are threatend with not being able to maintain their high social status.

As our data shows, insecurity of status expectations led to pronounced symptoms of dissatisfaction in those groups of students experiencing difficulties in scholastic performance. Apparently, even in high-ranking scholastic courses (e.g. in grammar school), the threat of downward mobility acts as a causal factor of social stress.

An investigation of whether the strict external differentiation of the West German secondary school system leads to other distribution patterns of status insecurity effects than are found in systems of a more comprehensive character and with more internal differentiation, is a task that should prove attractive to comparative educational research.

Note

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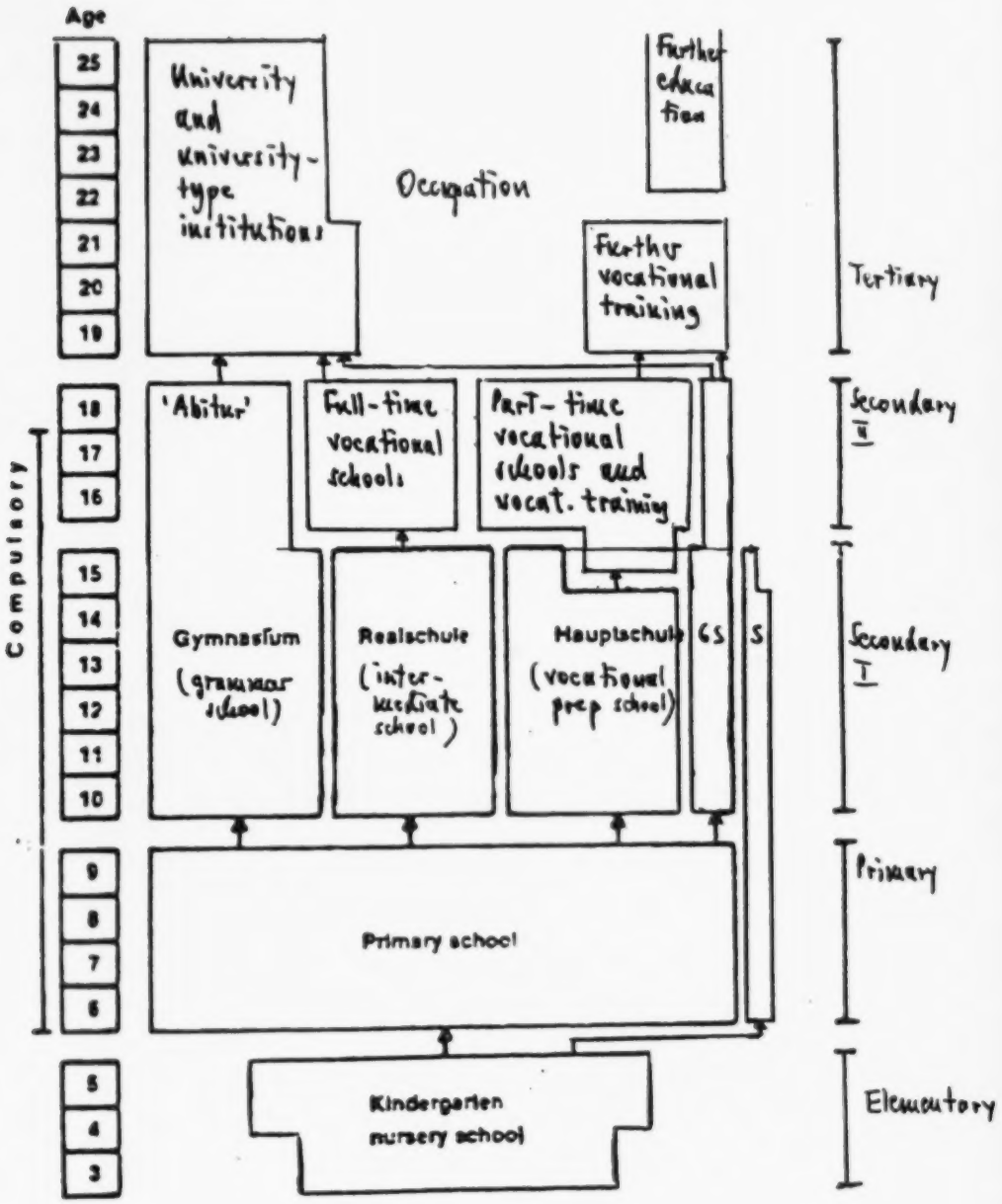
Figure 1 : Diagram of the structure of the West German school system



GS = Gesamtschule (comprehensive school)
S = Sonderschule (school of special education)